

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

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1. An imaging apparatus help system comprising:

an imaging apparatus that is connected to a network and is adapted to output and record an image on paper, the imaging apparatus including an operation unit, a display unit, and an
10 information memory unit; and

an information server that is connected to the network and is adapted to receive a communication information request from the imaging apparatus, the information server including an information storage unit storing a plurality of types of
15 communication information, wherein

when a user request for a predetermined type of the types of communication information is made at the operation unit of the imaging apparatus, if the predetermined type of communication information is stored in the information memory
20 unit of the imaging apparatus, the imaging apparatus reads the predetermined type of communication information from the information memory unit and displays the read communication information on the display unit, and if the predetermined type of communication information is not stored in the information
25 memory unit of the imaging apparatus, the imaging apparatus

sends a request for the predetermined type of communication information to the information server, and the information server reads the predetermined type of communication information from the information storage unit and sends the predetermined type of communication information to the imaging apparatus, and the imaging apparatus stores the predetermined type of communication in the information memory unit and displays the predetermined type of communication information on the display unit; and

the imaging apparatus stores in the information memory unit one or more of the types of communication information received from the information server, and deletes at least a portion of the stored one or more types of communication information when a remaining storage capacity of the information memory unit is reduced to no more than a predetermined capacity.

2. The imaging apparatus help system as claimed in claim 1, wherein the communication information corresponds to help information pertaining to operating the imaging apparatus.

3. The imaging apparatus help system as claimed in claim
1, wherein the deletion of the communication information is
5 performed in chronological order according to a storage date of
the communication information stored in the information memory
unit.

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4. The imaging apparatus help system as claimed in claim
1, wherein the deletion of the communication information is
performed based on a usage frequency order of the communication
15 information stored in the information memory unit.

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5. The imaging apparatus help system as claimed in claim
1, wherein the deletion of the communication information is
performed based on a data size of the communication information
stored in the information memory unit.

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6. The imaging apparatus help system as claimed in claim
1, wherein the communication information includes a program
5 that is executable at the imaging apparatus.

10 7. The imaging apparatus help system as claimed in claim
6, wherein the program corresponds to a JAVA applet.

15 8. The imaging apparatus help system as claimed in claim
6, wherein the program corresponds to a mobile agent.

20 9. The imaging apparatus help system as claimed in claim
1, wherein each type of communication information is described
in a plurality of formats, and a format is selected at the
25 imaging apparatus for providing the predetermined type of

communication information that is requested at the operation unit, the predetermined type of communication information in the selected format being read from the information memory unit and displayed if the predetermined type of communication
5 information in the selected format is stored in the information memory unit, and a communication information request for the predetermined type of communication information in the selected format being made to the information server if the predetermined type of communication information in the selected
10 format is not stored in the information memory unit, after which the predetermined type of communication information in the selected format from the information server is stored in the information memory unit and displayed on the display unit.

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10. The imaging apparatus help system as claimed in claim 9, wherein the communication information in one format includes
20 a program that is executable at the imaging apparatus.

25 11. The imaging apparatus help system as claimed in claim

9, wherein the communication information in one format includes switching a language in which the communication information is to be displayed.

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12. An imaging apparatus help system comprising:

a plurality of imaging apparatuses and a help server that
10 are connected to a network, wherein each of the imaging
apparatuses and the help server has a storage unit for storing
help data; and

help data operation means for realizing a help data
operation when one of the imaging apparatuses connected to the
15 network requires a predetermined type of help data, the help
data operation being performed on at least one other device
connected to the network.

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13. The imaging apparatus help system as claimed in claim
12, wherein the help data operation includes at least one of
reading, writing, and deleting predetermined help data.

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14. An imaging apparatus help system comprising:

5 a plurality of imaging apparatuses and a help server that are connected to a network, wherein each of the imaging apparatuses and the help server has a storage unit for storing help data; and

inquiry means for making an inquiry about an availability
10 of help data when one of the imaging apparatuses connected to the network requires a predetermined type of help data, the inquiry being made on at least one other device connected to the network.

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15. The imaging apparatus help system as claimed in claim 14, wherein the device corresponds to another imaging apparatus
20 connected to the network.

25 16. The imaging apparatus help system as claimed in claim

14, wherein the device corresponds to the help server.

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17. The imaging apparatus help system as claimed in claim 14, wherein the help data includes a moving image object.

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18. The imaging apparatus help system as claimed in claim 14, wherein the help data includes audio data.

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19. An imaging apparatus help system comprising:

a plurality of imaging apparatuses and a help server that
20 are connected to a network, wherein each of the imaging
apparatuses and the help server has a storage unit for storing
help data; and

comparing means for comparing the help data stored in one
of the imaging apparatuses connected to the network and the
25 help data stored in the help server; and

updating means for updating the help data stored in said one imaging apparatus when it is determined by the comparison means that the help data stored in said one imaging apparatus are old, the updating being realized by downloading the help data stored in the help server to said one imaging apparatus.

10 20. An imaging apparatus help system comprising:

a plurality of imaging apparatuses and a plurality of help servers that are connected to a network, wherein each of the help servers has a storage unit for storing help data that are to be provided to the imaging apparatuses; and

15 comparing means for comparing help data stored in the respective help servers; and

updating means for updating help data when it is determined by the comparing means that the help data stored in one of the help servers are old, the updating being realized by downloading to said one help server the help data stored in another one of the help servers storing new help data.

21. A method of providing help information to an imaging apparatus that is connected to a help server via a network, wherein the help server has a storage unit storing a plurality of types of help information, and the imaging apparatus has a
5 memory unit for storing one or more of the types of help information received from the help server, the method comprising:

searching for a predetermined type of the types of help information in the memory unit of the imaging apparatus;
10 requesting the help server to send the predetermined type of help information to the imaging apparatus when the predetermined type of help information is not found in the searching step;

sending the predetermined type of help information from
15 the help server to the imaging apparatus and storing the predetermined type of help information in the memory unit; and

deleting at least a portion of the one or more types of help information stored in the memory unit according to a predetermined rule when a remaining storage capacity of the
20 memory unit is reduced to no more than a predetermined capacity.

25 22. A method of providing help data to an imaging

apparatus that is connected to at least one other imaging apparatus and a help server via a network, wherein the imaging apparatus, the other imaging apparatus and the help server each have a storage unit for storing one or more types of help data, 5 the method comprising:

making an inquiry about an availability of a predetermined type of help data to the other imaging apparatus; and

if the predetermined type of help data is available at the other imaging apparatus, reading and sending the predetermined 10 type of help data from the other imaging apparatus to the imaging apparatus, and storing the predetermined type of help data in the imaging apparatus.

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23. The method as claimed in claim 22, further comprising:

comparing the help data stored in the imaging apparatus 20 and the help data stored in the help server; and

updating the help data stored in the imaging apparatus when it is determined in the comparing step that the help data stored in the imaging apparatus are old, the updating being realized by downloading to the imaging apparatus the help data 25 stored in the help server corresponding to new help data.

5 24. A method of providing help data to an imaging
apparatus that is connected to a local help server, and a
global help server via a network, wherein the imaging apparatus,
the local help server, and the global help server each have a
storage unit for storing one or more types of help data, the
10 method comprising:

 making an inquiry about an availability of a predetermined
type of help data to the local help server; and

 if the predetermined type of help data is available at the
local help server, reading and sending the predetermined type
15 of help data from the local help server to the imaging
apparatus, and storing the predetermined type of help data in
the imaging apparatus.

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 25. The method as claimed in claim 24, further
comprising:

 comparing the help data stored in the local help server
25 and the help data stored in the global help server; and

updating the help data stored in the local help server
when it is determined in the comparing step that the help data
stored in the local help server are old, the updating being
realized by downloading to the local help server the help data
5 stored in the global help server corresponding to new help data.

10 27. An imaging apparatus for use in an imaging apparatus
help system, which help system includes an information server
connected to the imaging apparatus via a network, the
information server including an information storage unit for
storing a plurality of types of communication information, and
15 being adapted to receive a communication information request
from the imaging apparatus, the imaging apparatus comprising:

an operation unit for making a user request for a
predetermined type of the types of communication information;

a display unit for displaying the requested communication
20 information; and

a memory unit for storing one or more of the types of
communication information; wherein

if the predetermined type of communication information is
stored in the memory unit, the imaging apparatus reads the
25 predetermined type of communication information from the memory

unit and displays the read communication information on the display; and

if the predetermined type of communication information is not stored in the memory unit, the imaging apparatus makes a
5 communication information request for the predetermined type of communication information to the information server, and the information server reads the predetermined type of communication information from the storage unit and sends the predetermined type of communication information to the imaging
10 apparatus, and the imaging apparatus stores the predetermined type of communication information in the memory unit and displays the predetermined type of communication information on the display unit; and

the imaging apparatus deletes at least a portion of the
15 one or more types of communication information stored in the memory unit when a remaining storage capacity of the memory unit is reduced to no more than a predetermined capacity.